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ABSTRACT

With the changing demographics in college populations, educators can no longer offer students a curriculum that denies the very existence of women and minorities. Yet this is precisely what occurs in the traditional or womanless curriculum. If one recognizes the limitations of a curriculum that accepts male experience as universal, one is ready to begin curriculum transformation. A questionnaire was sent to all community college humanities departments in an attempt to ascertain what faculty were doing to balance their humanities courses for gender and how they were doing it. Over 250 responses from more than 70 different colleges were received. Based on these responses, the following suggestions are offered to faculty interested in transforming their humanities courses: (1) start wherever colleagues and institutions feel most comfortable (usually this means beginning to incorporate more works by women or material that includes women's experiences); (2) in classes where instructors have no control over textbook selection or where inclusion of material on or by women is not appropriate, raise epistemological and pedagogical questions that challenge the traditional curriculum and scholarship; (3) read books on curriculum transformation and contact people involved in curriculum transformation projects; (4) attend professional conferences and read journals where curriculum transformation material is presented; (5) use faculty development funds at the institution to support workshops, seminars, and consultants to begin the important institutional work of curriculum transformation; (6) check into the use of gender equity and affirmative action funds as possible sources for funding curriculum transformation projects. (JB)

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TRANSFORMING THE CURRICULUM FOR EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

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TRANSFORMING THE CURRICULUM FOR EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

What is curriculum transformation and why should we be doing it, both as individuals and as institutions? Sara Coulter, Co-director of the Towson State University curriculum transformation project, recently defined curriculum transformation (sometimes called curriculum integration, inclusive curriculum, or balancing the curriculum)[1] as " a long term goal...more a process than an endpoint, a curriculum in which the content, conceptual framework, and pedagogy would represent the experience, perspective, and learning style of all.... A curriculum transformation project is an organized effort to introduce traditional faculty to feminist theory and scholarship in order to encourage them to begin the process of transforming their courses, to make changes in the direction of including material by and about women in their courses, of changing the conceptual framework or fundamental paradigms of their course and discipline to accommodate human diversity and of revising their pedagogy." Curriculum transformation thus leads to the "Opening of the American Mind[2]

With the changing demographics in our college populations, particularly the increasing number of women and minority students, we can no longer offer our students a curriculum which, according to Hazel Carby, denies their very existence (Jones 3). And that is precisely what occurs in the traditional or womanless curriculum (McIntosh 3). At this phase "there is no consciousness that the male experience is a 'particular knowledge' selected from a wider universe of possible knowledge and experience. It is valued, emphasized, and viewed as the knowledge most worth having" (Tetreault 368). On the other hand, if one recognizes the limitations of a curriculum which accepts male experience as universal, one

is ready to begin curriculum transformation. Compensatory scholarship is the second and, for most, the least threatening phase. At this point one begins to "search for missing women according to a male norm of greatness" (Tetreault 368). However, the inclusion of women usually leads to awareness that traditional structures may not work to explain women's experience. One begins to question "fundamental and unquestioned assumptions about canon, ideas, value, authority, and method that operate in the academy and in the disciplines....[One recognizes] the implicit androcentric perspective that...screens out or obscures achievements of all women and non-elite men...[and the need for a] paradigm shift" (Christ 53).

Although the curriculum transformation movement is too brief to indicate long term benefits (having been in existence for only about fifteen years) research shows that as a result of more inclusive courses, "students report increased self-esteem, interpret their own experiences within a larger social context...[and] expand their sense of life options and goals"(Andersen 233). The effects on faculty are equally impressive. Faculty "report new enthusiasm for their work...see new ...directions for their teaching...discuss and share course syllabi, pedagogical problems and successes" (Andersen 234). The "new material deepens and refreshes other material" (Van Dyne).

Having read about curriculum transformation projects and been involved in one on my campus[3], I was interested in finding out what faculty at other community colleges in California were doing to balance their humanities [4] courses for gender and how they were doing it. Consequently, in fall 1988, while on sabbatical as a Visiting Scholar at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, I sent questionnaires to Deans of Humanities at all California community colleges asking them to distribute the questionnaires to

humanities faculty at their institutions.[5] Questionnaires were also distributed through various targeted mailings lists. [6] My purpose was not statistical but informational. I wanted to gather materials for a resource book that could be used by faculty who were interested in integrating their courses for gender. I also wished to include as much material as possible on and by minority women.

I received over 250 responses from more than 70 different colleges. Most of the responses were from teachers of English(129). There were also responses from history (39), art history (28) , philosophy and religious studies (24), humanities (21), music history (11), and 8 from other disciplines. One third of the responses were from men, and all but nine of the responses were positive. The negative responses were typical of resistance recorded in the literature gathered from curriculum transformation projects [7] and indicate the nature of the faculty development work that needs to be done if a transformed curriculum is to be achieved.

In addition to responses to the questionnaire were letters and notes that convinced me of not only the need for a resource book but also the need for a network. Faculty wrote of how lonely and frustrating it was to try to integrate their courses when they seemed to be the only ones at their college attempting this important work. Others described their struggle to overcome their own educational biases and the lack of time to read the new scholarship on women.

There were many others, however, eager to share materials. They sent course outlines, bibliographies, and study guides. Several wrote that they would be happy to send additional material. Some even wrote that I could contact them at home if I would like to chat about the materials. Many

wished me luck with my findings and looked forward to the results.

Equally positive were responses to specific questions. Almost every introductory course one could think of was cited in response to a question asking faculty to list courses in which they integrate material on and/or by women. This is of particular importance because introductory courses contain the fundamental concepts of the discipline and reach the broadest student audience. Most faculty also integrate material from other disciplines, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the new scholarship on women. Almost all faculty also integrate material on race and ethnicity, although many bemoaned the lack of material by minority women, especially Hispanic and Asian women [8]. Faculty reported student reaction to curriculum integration as positive, their own satisfaction as high, and resistance as negligible. Almost all curriculum integration was accomplished through required texts selected by the individual teachers. Despite these overwhelmingly positive responses, curriculum integration was usually done on one's own, and at only three institutions was curriculum integration part of an institutional effort that involved extra pay, reassigned time, or faculty development seminars or workshops.

Based upon these responses, I would like to suggest the following to faculty interested in transforming their humanities courses.

1. Start wherever you and/or your colleagues and/or your institutions feel most comfortable. Usually this will be at "phase two" or "compensatory scholarship," i.e., beginning to incorporate more works by women or more material that includes women's experiences[9].

2. In classes where you have no control over textbook selection or where inclusion of material on or by women is not appropriate, raise epistemological and pedagogical questions that challenge the

traditional curriculum and scholarship.

3. Read books on curriculum transformation and contact people involved in curriculum transformation projects.

4. Attend professional conferences and read journals where curriculum transformation material is presented.

5. Use faculty development funds at your institution to support workshops, seminars, and consultants to begin the important institutional work of curriculum transformation.

6. Check into the use of gender equity and affirmative action funds as possible sources for funding curriculum transformation projects.

Curriculum transformation, however, is not just about equity; it is also about excellence, but an expanded and enriched definition of excellence. "One cannot have excellence in America without equity in behavior, thought and action...Diversity in higher education is that which occurs at the intersection of quality and equality. It is what results when co-equal emphasis is placed on excellence and equity" (Slaughter 13). As we integrate the curriculum through the inclusion of more diverse materials, as we raise questions that challenge the traditional paradigms, as we teach our students to both understand and appreciate difference, we balance the curriculum, and in so doing, balance excellence and equity. This process not only transforms the curriculum but also transforms our students, our institutions, and ourselves.

NOTES

[1] Although these terms are not synonymous, nor are the distinctions merely semantic, for the purposes of this paper, they are used interchangeably. For a good discussion of the differences among them, see Andersen, pp.228-229.

[2] "Opening the American Mind" is the title of a University of California at Los Angeles curriculum integration project funded by the Fund for Instructional Improvement in Postsecondary Education (FIPSE).

[3] Pasadena City College participated in the Western States Project on Women in the Curriculum funded by the Ford Foundation and hosted the dissemination conference of that project.

[4] For the purposes of this project, I have defined humanities according to the guidelines of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

[5] California community colleges are two-year public institutions offering students the opportunity to complete their lower-division courses before transferring to a four-year college or university.

[6] The questionnaire was published in Inside English and sent to humanities faculty on mailing lists issued by the Center for Academic Interinstitutional Programs at UCLA and the California Humanities Project.

[7] Negative responses ranged from "I include only eminent works" to "I don't select works on the basis of gender" to "I don't know any works by minority women." For additional examples of resistance, see Aiken.

[8] For information on model programs to integrate the curriculum not only for gender but also for race, ethnicity, and class, see Radical Teacher: Balancing the Curriculum. 37.

[9] To receive the resource book that resulted from the questionnaire, write to the Community College Humanities Association, c/o Community College of Philadelphia, 1700 Spring Garden Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130 and ask for Women and the Humanities: A Resource Book for Curriculum Integration, edited by Phyllis Mael. The questionnaire and resource book were funded by grants from the Community College Humanities Association and the California Community College Fund for Instructional Improvement.

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